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ABSTRACT

Most efforts at combating teenage pregnancy have focused on cognitive/educational levels felt by concerned adults to be of greatest importance. However, recent research has demonstrated the connection between lack of career goals, low self-esteem, perception of narrow options, and risk-taking behavior as factors leading to pregnancy. A 3-year research project was undertaken to survey 1207 urban teenage women regarding their aspirations, values, and motivations for career and other life choices. Data on feminist values was obtained as well. The project was carried out as part of a multi-year foundation funded research and demonstration effort to stimulate and support career oriented motivation for young women as an alternative to early motherhood. The target population consisted of female students enrolled at four urban high schools which had high dropout and early pregnancy rates. In the 1981-1982 study, students ranked education, financial independence, and self-worth as the most important life aspirations, with motherhood ranked as a lower priority. In the 1982-1983 study, most teenagers expected to complete high school and to attend college. The expectation of working was almost universal, regardless of marital status, and most respondents envisioned themselves as working mothers. The results of this study suggest new strategies for prevention of unwanted pregnancy and for maximizing alternatives to early parenthood. These strategies are preventive, developmental, and self-help in nature and are seen as appropriate to an era of economic retrenchment for human services. Recommendations for program strategies include targeting resources to those at risk, expanding cognitive teaching awareness of life options, building family support, teaching birth control, legitimizing parenthood as a life choice, and emphasizing feminist principles. (Author/ABL)

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ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY PREVENTION: STRATEGIES FOR THE '80'S

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Introduction

The subject of teen values is a highly charged one in the adult world, prone to exaggerations and misinterpretation. Teen sexuality in particular has been the topic of an enormous body of literature, research and public debate. Early pregnancy, abortion, venereal disease and economic dependency are the societal concerns associated with irresponsible teen sexuality. In spite of the massive attempts to understand and intervene in these problems, the causal complexities continue to defy successful programmatic intervention. The incidence of unwanted adolescent pregnancy continues unabated, actually increasing as indicated by Guttmacher Institute reports.[1]

Of all the many program efforts and demonstrations mounted to impact the problems noted above, the arena which has received relatively little attention is that of motivation and values of teens. While there have been a variety of explanations offered about why teen women become pregnant, few programs have actually attempted to base interventions on the value structure of particular groups of teen women. Rather, most efforts have been targetted at cognitive/educational levels felt by concerned adults (often professionals) to be of greatest importance, such as provision of information. Motivation as a concept has, in fact, presented considerable difficulty in the area of measurement, as discussed by Luker in her study of abortion

decision behavior.[2] However, one of the few studies specifically focused on teen motivation, conducted recently in Michigan demonstrated the connection between lack of career goals, low self esteem, perception of narrow options, and risk-taking behavior leading to pregnancy.[3]

Most studies of teen sexual behavior inevitably focus on the negative values of teens in their failure to act preventively to avoid unwanted consequences. Almost nothing has been written about the positive values of teens and their potential for motivating future-oriented, non risk-taking behavior. While developmental literature assumes the internalization of adult values by a process of introjection, adolescence is also known to be a time of enormous identity crisis in which the teen is in a state of "becoming."[4,5] Values during the teen years, which vacillate between parental and peer group influences, may be at their greatest state of disparity with actions taken. This disparity may account for the strong evidence provided by statistics, such as unintended pregnancy rates, that teen women often do not act in their own best interests, or even in accordance with their own stated values.[6]

The data presented in this paper were collected between 1981 and 1983 as part of a multi-year research and demonstration project to support and provide future, career-oriented motivation to young women as an alternative to early motherhood. The program, which is supported by

private foundations, is administered by a feminist-oriented community agency in San Diego. The target population for the project was female students attending four San Diego high schools which have high drop-out and early pregnancy rates. At these three "high risk" schools, 969 young women were sampled about their attitudes towards parenthood, work, welfare, sex roles, sexuality and pregnancy, feminism, and future aspirations.

Study Design and Methodology

The design of the research to be reported was developed as an exploratory-descriptive study. The format used for data collection was a self-administered questionnaire, collecting both demographic and attitudinal data. In the 1981-82 format 557 young women at 3 urban high schools were sampled about their attitudes towards parenthood, work, welfare, sex roles, sexuality and pregnancy, feminism, and their own values and future aspirations. Based on results from this survey, several changes were made for the 1982-83 data collection, which focused on career and education aspirations, life satisfaction, attitudes towards feminism, and which included an indicator of learned helplessness.[7,8] Second year data on attitudes towards sex, pregnancy, and parenthood were not obtained due to barriers raised by the school district. In the 1982-83 format a total of 412 teen women were surveyed, enrolled at 4 urban high schools. In

addition, a small sub-sample was obtained from an in-depth interview survey of 11 project club members.

As noted in the introduction, the sample was drawn from "high risk" urban high schools, defined by the project as those which have the highest rates of school dropout and of known pregnancy in the total school district. The schools studied were ethnically diverse with Whites, Blacks, Hispanics and Asians well represented. For example, one high school had an 83% Black enrollment; another had 52% Hispanic students, while still another school was 29% Asian and 48% White. Our sample was composed of unpaid teen women volunteers in all grades from freshman to seniors, but was not a random selection. Opportunities for obtaining subjects were sought in several ways: in class rooms, participants at club activities, and club project members. Possible bias must be considered due to the non-random nature of the sample, self-selection, and qualities of some subjects sampled; e.g. project club members.

Demographics

The following five tables present basic demographic data about the sample population.

Table 1

Grade

N = 969

Grade	1981-82		1982-83		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Freshman	76	13.79	107	25.99	183	18.9
Sophomore	164	29.4	147	35.7	311	32.0
Junior	113	20.2	97	23.5	210	21.7
Senior	204	36.7	42	10.2	246	25.4
No Response	0	0	19	4.6	19	2.0
Total	557	100%	412	100	969	100

In Table 1 we see that the sample was spread across all four grades with sophomores the most heavily represented.

Table 2

Ethnicity

N = 969

	1981-82		1982-83		Total	
Ethnicity	#	%	#	%	#	%
White	143	25.7	95	23.0	238	24.6
Black	239	43.0	121	29.4	360	37.2
Chicano/Mex Amer	98	17.6	96	23.3	194	20.0
Asian	47	8.4	45	10.9	92	9.5
Other	30	5.3	31	7.5	61	6.3
No Response	0	0	24	5.8	24	2.4
Total	557	100	412	100	969	100

Table 2 shows the ethnic characteristics of the sample, with Blacks (37.2%) the largest group, followed by Whites (24.6%) and Chicano/Mexican Americans (20%). Asians made up 9.5% of the sample.

Table 3

Mother Working Outside Home

N = 969

Work Status	1981-82		1982-83		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Working (Full or Part time)	346	62.2	226	55.0	572	59.0
Not Working	185	33.2	163	39.5	348	35.9
No Response	26	4.6	23	5.5	49	5.0
Total	557	100	412	100	969	100

Close to 60% of the respondents reported that their mothers were working. Data in full time/part time breakdown was only collected fro 1982-83. It showed that of the 226 mothers working, 164 or 39.9% of the total sample were working fulltime, while 62 (15%) were working part time. These figures are higher than for the U.S. population in general.[9]

Data on household composition and motherhood status was only collected for 1981-82 due to restrictions imposed by the school district in 1982-83. It is presented below in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION (1981-82)

N = 557

High School	Mother & Father	Mother or Father plus stepparent	Other	Total
School A	50	9	70	129
	38.8%	6.9%	54.3%	100%
School B	105	17	44	166
	63.2%	10.2%	26.6%	100%
School C	94	26	142	262
	35.9%	9.9%	54.2%	100%
TOTAL	249	52	256	557
	44.8%	9.3%	45.9%	100%

We see that close to half (45.9%) of our study population lived in a household of other than the traditional two parent type. Our data does not supply the exact characteristics of these households.

Table 5

MOTHERHOOD STATUS (1981-82)

N = 557

High School	Yes	No	No Ans.	Total
School A	13	113	3	129
	10.0%	87.6%	2.4%	100%
School B	1	165	0	166
	.6%	99.4%	0%	100%
School C	21	234	7	262
	8.0%	89.4%	2.6%	100%
TOTAL	35	512	10	557
	6.3%	91.9%	1.7%	100%

The figures in Table 5 show that 6.3% of our respondents in 1981-82 stated that they were already mothers. We believe this is a low figure, and that some of the non response group are also mothers.

Major Findings

From the 1981-82 data the major findings of the study are summarized in the following:

1. Student Values: Education, Financial Independence, and Self-Worth

Students were almost unaminous in their ranking of education, financial independence, and excellence (self-worth) as the most important aspirations in their lives. It is worth noting that these values, selected by the

female students in this survey, ranked above a good marriage or relationship in overall importance. It is again obvious that, given the high-risk characteristics of the population studied, there is a gap between aspirations and reality.

2. Socioeconomic and Cultural Differences in Values

The findings of the survey revealed consistent differences which can be attributed to ethnic, cultural, environmental, and economic factors. Unfortunately the structure of the data analysis did not permit cross-tabulations of ethnicity and values. However, the heavy sampling of specific groups at each of the three high schools allows for some interpretations about ethnic/cultural differences.

For young Black women (School C), good education, financial independence, and self-worth (excellence) were more highly valued taken together than among the other sample groups. Hispanics (School A) varied from the total group as follows: with the exception of education they gave lower value to all the dimensions tested. For the White students (School B) social relationships, marriage, and parenthood emerge as more important than for the students at the other two schools.

3. Myths About Teen Values

A surprise finding of the survey is the low relative ranking (fifth and seventh positions respectively out of

eight choices) of attractiveness and being liked. Much literature about adolescence focuses on the superficial and narcissistic concerns of this developmental stage. The young women in our sample expressed, by contrast, serious and practical values and concerns, choosing education and financial independence above popularity.

4. Motherhood a Low Priority

In spite of the sampling of "high-risk" schools where it is believed that students are more likely to become pregnant than at other local high schools, the young women in our sample ranked "being a mother and raising kids" seventh in importance out of eight choices. This finding seems to demonstrate that young women are aware that early motherhood is not in their best interests, even when it seems like the most obvious choice.

5. Dissatisfaction with Current Living Situation

A surprising 64.2% of our sample expressed a desire to change their living situation. While this dissatisfaction with home life can be seen as typical of adolescence, it may also be related to environmental/economic stress in this sample, and could provide strong motivation to escape an unhappy home life by way of early pregnancy. Almost 10% of the women sampled (see Table 17) stated that they would "get married and have kids" if they could change their living situation right now. While this is a minority of respondents, if they carry out their desires a significant

number of teen pregnancies would result. Strong differences between the schools were noted in responses to this question, with ethnic and cultural implications.

6. Future Plans Uncertain

While 94.9% of the young women sampled stated plans for the future with respect to how they would like to combine work and family life, only 55.9% had definite plans about their future work.

7. Motherhood as a Life Goal

Among our respondents, 65.7% said that they would like to be a mother "someday". This is consistent with the low ranking (seventh place) accorded to marriage and motherhood in the values section of the report (Table 13). Given the finding discussed above under "Dissatisfaction with Living Situation" and "Uncertain Future Plans" it is likely that many of these young women will see motherhood as an immediate and achievable aspiration in contrast to more remote career goals.

8. Views on Parenting

Responses on a list of parenting tasks show that 64.3% of the young women studied support joint responsibility (mothers and fathers) for most tasks. This finding seems to indicate modest support for changing sex roles in our society, and is worthy of further exploration. No baseline data are available for this population which would provide data on changing trends as reflected by teens.

9. Occupational Sex-Role Typing

In relation to jobs and career choices, the study found that 79.2% of the young women studied believed that many occupations are, or should be, limited to one sex or the other, following traditional work patterns. Perhaps this is not surprising considering the available role models for our study population.

10. Double Standard

The survey revealed, to our surprise, the existence of a strong double standard in relation to teenage pregnancy. Overall, our students agreed that the teen woman who becomes pregnant is considered more stigmatized (83.3%) than the teen male who becomes a father (65.7%). Only 16.7% think that a young woman is admired for early pregnancy but 34.3% of these female respondents felt that a young man is admired for becoming a father. Very different findings were registered among the three schools which again speak to strong cultural/ethnic differences.

11. Birth Control Use

Another surprising finding of the study was that 38.7% of the young women studied believe that it is wrong for an unmarried woman to use birth control. The School C sample, primarily Black, felt most strongly about this subject, with 48.8% against the use of birth control by unmarried women. The reasons for these beliefs are no doubt complex, and rooted in cultural and religious norms.

In the 1982-83 study, where some changes were made in data collection, the following major findings were obtained:

1. Motivation

The overwhelming majority of our teen women see themselves as working mothers. The expectation of working is almost universal, regardless of marital status. As in the previous year's study, our teen women were very optimistic about their stated goals. While only three-quarters of our large survey population had specific career goals, over 90% of our club project members were able to state their goals. More than 90% of the students expected to complete high school, and the majority saw themselves as going on to college. However, the same gap between cognitive aspirations and predicted life experiences was seen here for these high-risk students as was observed in the first year of the study.

The major sources of guidance and support for future career plans were given as parents, friends, and family members in that order. Guidance counselors and teachers ranked fourth and fifth as important sources of help. A third of our sample stated that they had received no help from teachers and guidance counselors in relation to career planning.

Use of the Hopelessness Scale this year offered new perspectives on motivation related issues, revealing the

students degree of optimism or pessimism about their ability to control future life events. In general the students surveyed seemed quite optimistic, which would be expected at this life stage. There were significant differences between schools, little differences generated by age, and very substantial differences attributed to ethnicity. The scores for Asian students were considerably lower than those for the other subgroups -- White, Black, Chicano, and Other. The large influx of Vietnamese, Laotian, and Cambodian refugees represented in our Asian Sample may account for this difference. We belive that the depressed Asian scores may reflect cultural differences or the influence of refugee status and experience on these young women. Chicana students registered the second lowest scores on the Hopelessness Scale. This finding is similar to last year's study, which found Chicana students most accepting of traditional female roles, and having lower aspirations in general. Black students continue to hold their place as most optimistic in our student survey.

2. Motherhood and Sexuality

Almost two-thirds of the survey respondents expected to be mothers ten years from now. However, our in-depth club project survey showed that the wish (and intent) for motherhood is almost universal. This is not a surprising finding in the context of human nature. What is susceptible to outside influence is the timing and planning

of motherhood, as shown by the much lower rate (less than half) at which club project members expected to be a mother within ten years as compared with the non-project sample. On the in-depth survey these young women's responses about were positive, but indicated caution about readiness and appropriate choice of partner. Commenting on the outcomes of a pregnancy while in high school, only a small minority of club project members suggested abortion. Most members suggested keeping the child and continuing with school.

Our survey respondents believed that many of their friends were sexually active, and stated a non-judgmental acceptance of their peers' behavior. With regard to their personal choices, over half of our project members were not ready to become sexually active. When asked about the use of birth control by unmarried teen women, 10 out of 11 respondents supported this practice. In contrast with the previous year's survey where only 54% supported use of birth control, we see that our club project members view this issue (sexuality) in a considerably more responsible light.

It is unfortunate that we were not able to obtain motherhood and sexuality data from our survey population this year, due to concerns of the school system. The views obtained from the club project members seem to indicate a thoughtful and level headed approach to these issues. We believe this would be a significant contrast to the general

school population, if parallel data were available.

3. Feminism

Three quarters of our survey population are clear in their support of equality for women, and in the right of women to stand up for themselves. When responses about womens equality were correlated with future life plans, clear differences emerged among groups. Women who selected fulltime work, along with single status with no children, or marriage combined with children were strongly in support of equality for women. Students who selected single parenthood, non-working status, and part-time work, tended not to support womens equality.

Possible explanations for this finding include personality type, cultural traditionalism, and low self-esteem. Low self-esteem and cultural traditionalism as explanations were supported by the scores on the Hopelessness Scale. High scores were achieved by women who expect to work fulltime and also attain motherhood, while expectations of not working and not having children were associated with low scores. Expectations of marriage do not seem to be strongly correlated with Hopelessness scores. These data stimulate speculations about the relationships between concepts of self image, and feminism with mental health.

Club project members differed from the survey group on women's issues, giving 100% support to equality for women

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contrasted with 73% of our large survey this year. We suggest a strong linkage between support for women's equality and improved self-esteem and willingness to be assertive on the part of our club project women.

Program Strategies: Recommendations

1. Prevention: At Risk Focus

Consistent with good public health practice, we are reiterating the logic and efficiency of targetting services on those most at risk. Our study supports the great gap among our high risk population between aspirations and expected life outcomes. Given increasingly limited resources, our position is that these must be focused on those who experience the greatest risk, in other words, young people whose school records or other demographics suggest that they are least likely to complete school and most likely to enter early parenthood. In making such a recommendation, we recognize that programs focussed on those most at risk often show low success rates, which can be a funding and program evaluation problem. We believe that realistic goal setting and careful selection of the service population can offset these difficulties.

2. Expanding Life Options

The need for expanding cognitive awareness of life options is already well accepted in work with youth.

Our study has demonstrated that, contrary to our understanding, the majority of students in our study feel that they receive little help in planning their futures. Knowledge about a wide variety of career choices, and the kinds of preparation needed for these choices, must be made more accessible to the high risk population. Our data indicate that young women's perception of career choices are still limited by traditional sex role stereotypes. Information which broadens their perception of acceptable occupations needs to be consciously promoted. Additionally, training in self awareness and problem solving skills is necessary equipment for the processing of cognitive information about life and career choices.

3. Building Family Support

While the need to assist families in motivating young people toward positive life choices is an old idea, our study raises the conflict between traditional values and new career options for women. The current need to build family support requires a bridging of the gap between traditional values for women and new options and choices which are available. We are, therefore, recommending that outreach and media programs be mounted to provide such information about new options for women to families.

4. Birth Control Education

Our study supports earlier findings about strong cultural differences in values and beliefs concerning fertility, parenthood and womanhood. Cognitive approaches to birth control education alone will not be effective. Birth control education for teen women must be presented in a way which is compatible with the cultural values of the group. Thus, education in this area should be tailored to each main cultural group and cannot effectively be offered without a cultural context. Today's professionals are at risk of an unconscious bias that their family planning values for a particular group are shared by that group.

5. Cultural Relevance

While the use of culturally relevant approaches for established American subgroups is standard practice today, our data point out the need for the development of new approaches for recent immigrant groups, particularly those of refugee status. Every effort should be made to create relevant programs for recent immigrants whose life expectations may require different kinds of role models.

6. Legitimizing Parenthood as a Life Choice

Most of the survey respondents in the two years of our study expected to attain motherhood within the

next several years; motherhood is an almost universal wish for our teen women. Aspirations for motherhood on the part of teen women should be treated as a legitimate life choice and supported in the context of careful and thoughtful planning and appropriate judgment about relationships. We believe that attention to and acceptance of motherhood as a goal would tend to decrease rather than increase the incidence of unplanned pregnancy as it would focus on timing and preparation.

7. Feminism as a Program Model

The importance of feminist perspectives in program content, particularly in the form of strong female role models and presentation of new options for women should not be underestimated. This year's study suggests that there is a linkage between good self-esteem, high aspirations, and feminism and suggests that the assertive and self-interested aspects of feminism may support positive life choices for the study population.

Future Research Needs

Five specific areas in which additional research is needed in relation to adolescent pregnancy have been identified by the researchers. They are as follows:

1. updated attitudinal studies of teen women's views of sexuality, womenhood, parenthood, and career

choices.

2. descriptive profiles of young women who see early pregnancy as a choice,
3. exploration of the concept of learned helplessness in relationship to life choices and early parenthood,
4. exploration of the relationship between feminist values and beliefs and attitudes about life choices and early parenthood,
5. descriptive and attitudinal studies of teen males on parenthood and life choices, paralleling data collected on the teen female population.

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